

NEW BOOKS

Blanka Szeghyová (Ed.). *The Role of Magic in the Past. Learned and Popular Magic, Popular Beliefs and Diversity of Attitudes* (Bratislava: Pro Historia, 2005), 255 pages. Published by Pro Historia Society in *História* series as its 1st volume. (In Slovak).

Magic in the past in its various forms, perceptions and definitions has been a popular subject of modern Western scholarship for a long time. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in contrast, the issue of magic is still a rather neglected area of study. Apart from the study of witchcraft and the work of ethnologists or anthropologists, whose research interests usually include present or recent case studies and phenomena, the subject of magic has not yet received due attention from historians and other scholars of the humanities in the region. This can be partly explained by the fact that communist policy, with its emphasis on class struggle, focused on certain topics – mainly political, economic and social history, almost bringing other fields and research interests to a standstill. The book is a very diverse collection of papers, in which, alongside authors who are recognized experts in the field and have published several books on magic, such as Éva Pócs and György Endre Szőnyi, are young scholars who have only recently joined the community of “magical” scholarship. The majority of authors, however, have their primary research interests elsewhere, but were still able to find enough relevant material to present and contribute to the scholarly discussion on the role of magic in the past. The book is rich in multiple approaches that can be taken when studying magical practices, beliefs and perceptions. Not only history and ethnology in general, but also historical anthropology, social history, history of science, art history, social psychology, psychology and history of religion, theology, philosophy, linguistics and literary studies all with their specific approaches and methodology contribute to a better understanding of the magic phenomenon.

Eduard Krekovič, Elena Mannová, Eva Krekovičová (Eds.). *Our Slovak Myths*. Published by the Institute of History, the Institute of Ethnology and the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava in Slovak Electronic Press 2005, 246 pp. (In Slovak).

“The greatness of a nation should involve its ability to see certain ‘sacred’ facts critically and with detachment,” so state the editors in their *Preface* to this ambitious and desired publication. Its main objective and most important merit is that it focuses on facts which, despite being well-known in intellectual and professional milieus, are still unknown to the wider public. Although the demythologization of national history has already begun in other countries, this sort of publication is to be particularly appreciated in our country. The 25 authors, whose contributions are included, have been careful to avoid exclusively ethnocentric, or even nationalist interpretations. To mention at least some of them: *Who are we and from what time are we here?*; *Cyril and Methodius: A persistent legacy?*; *Language Myths*; *The National Hero Juraj Jánošík* (a character similar to the English Robin Hood – L. H.); *The Slovak Republic 1939 – 1945*; *The Two-edged Slovak National Appraisal Myths*; *Where were we in fact living? Myths of constructing Communism, etc.* This selection alone shows that the authors aimed to demythologize as many of our myths as possible. This will not only contribute to a more proper knowledge of our past, but also to a more adequate understanding of our present predicament. The authors have succeeded in fulfilling this task – in spite of the fact that in some cases the reader might have expected an even more uncompromising and “ruthless” approach.

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